

LOS ANGELES – Representative Xavier Becerra (CA – 31) visited El Centro del Pueblo, a non-profit community service agency, today to host a child safety seat seminar in recognition of “National Child Passenger Safety Week.” Over 40 community participants joined the congressman to learn the specifics of passenger safety, including how to properly install a child car seat.

“I cannot put too fine a point on the importance of El Centro’s work to educate the community on child seat safety,” Rep. Becerra said. “These families are fortunate to have a worthy organization like El Centro del Pueblo working in innovative ways to keep children safe and secure.”

Despite ongoing efforts to protect child passengers, motor vehicle accidents are still the leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths among children ages 14 and under, claiming nearly 1,600 lives and resulting in approximately 228,000 injuries every year. Fourteen percent of children nationwide continue to ride completely unrestrained. However, of those who do buckle up, four out of five children are in restraints that are improperly selected, installed or used. El Centro del Pueblo’s Family Development Network has organized free child safety seat installation workshops since July 2001. In the process, it has given away hundreds of child seats to underprivileged families who could not otherwise afford them. At today’s seminar, the Family Development Network gave away 40 car seats.

At the beginning of this morning’s seminar, Rep. Becerra announced that El Centro del Pueblo will receive a fiscal year 2004 federal appropriations grant of \$100,000 through the Department of Commerce. The money will be used to expand its social service programs that are aimed at improving the quality of life for youth and their families living in some of the most impoverished and densely populated communities surrounding Downtown Los Angeles.

El Centro del Pueblo provides a wide range of programs including job training services, allowing youth to receive clothing, transportation and referrals; youth counseling services, including court advocacy, community awareness, and positive role modeling; family preservation services; child abuse and neglect intervention; behavior change outreach; and alcoholism prevention services. Additional services include organized recreational activities, tutoring, homework assistance and youth service graffiti removal.